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**Testimony of Ronnie Lowenstein**  
**Director, New York City Independent Budget Office**  
**To the New York City Council Committee on Education**  
**Oversight Hearing on Mayoral Control of New York City Schools**

**June 4, 2009**

Thank you Chairperson Jackson and members of the Committee. My name is Ronnie Lowenstein, and I am director of the New York City Independent Budget Office. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the Committee today.

The pending renewal of the school governance legislation raises a number of important issues regarding the control and oversight of the city's schools. IBO has previously testified that renewal of the legislation should include the closing of loopholes that allow the education department to escape the City Comptroller's review of contracts and the full authority of the city's procurement rules. Today, I think it is important that I focus my remarks on a matter much closer to home: school governance and the Independent Budget Office.

Over the months of public discussion on renewal of the school governance legislation, an expanded role for IBO has been mentioned with increasing frequency. This expanded role and the responsibility to report on student outcomes and other performance and fiscal data has been mentioned in task force reports, including from this Council's working group and from the Public Advocate, in bills recently introduced in Albany, and in statements by several legislative leaders. We are, to say the least, flattered.

We believe that the public officials, policy experts, parents, and others who have suggested an expanded role for IBO have done so because they recognize the objective and transparent way we approach our work. This approach includes making sure that the assumptions we make and the methodologies we use in our work are clearly spelled out. Simply put, we believe it is our job to be the "honest broker" when it comes to presenting the numbers.

If it is decided that IBO should take on the kind of expanded responsibilities some have suggested, it is essential that it be done in a way that maintains the standards that enable us to be the honest broker. This would involve several key elements.

IBO needs sufficient access to education department data in order to do the kind of thorough and impartial analysis that is expected of us. The access must be timely and in the form necessary for IBO to meet its responsibilities. This would confirm that the education department is subject to the same rules as other city agencies for providing IBO with data, statistics, and fiscal information. Confirming the

education department's obligation to provide requested information would also assist the City Council's oversight of the schools as well as that of the Comptroller, Public Advocate, and others.

IBO also needs adequate resources for fulfilling this expanded role. At least two of the bills introduced in Albany (A. 08553 and S.05576) provide a viable framework. Both of these bills lay out the kinds of additional products and increased analytic work that would be required of IBO and increases our funding accordingly.

Just as important is the way in which any increased resources are provided. Under the City Charter, IBO currently receives no less than 10 percent of the annual appropriations made to the Mayor's budget office. This annual appropriation—a guaranteed budget line as it is sometimes described—has been an essential factor in our ability to produce our work in an independent, nonpartisan manner. If our funding was contingent upon who we did or did not please in a given year, then it is likely that there would not be the same trust in our numbers that has led me to sit here today.

If city and state policymakers determine that IBO should take on the expanded role that some like this Committee's working group are suggesting, we are prepared to undertake that responsibility. We know that this responsibility comes with high expectations for accuracy, analytic integrity, and objectivity. IBO will need the access to information, the necessary resources, and the continued protection of its independent standing to meet those expectations.

Thank you and I will be glad to answer your questions.